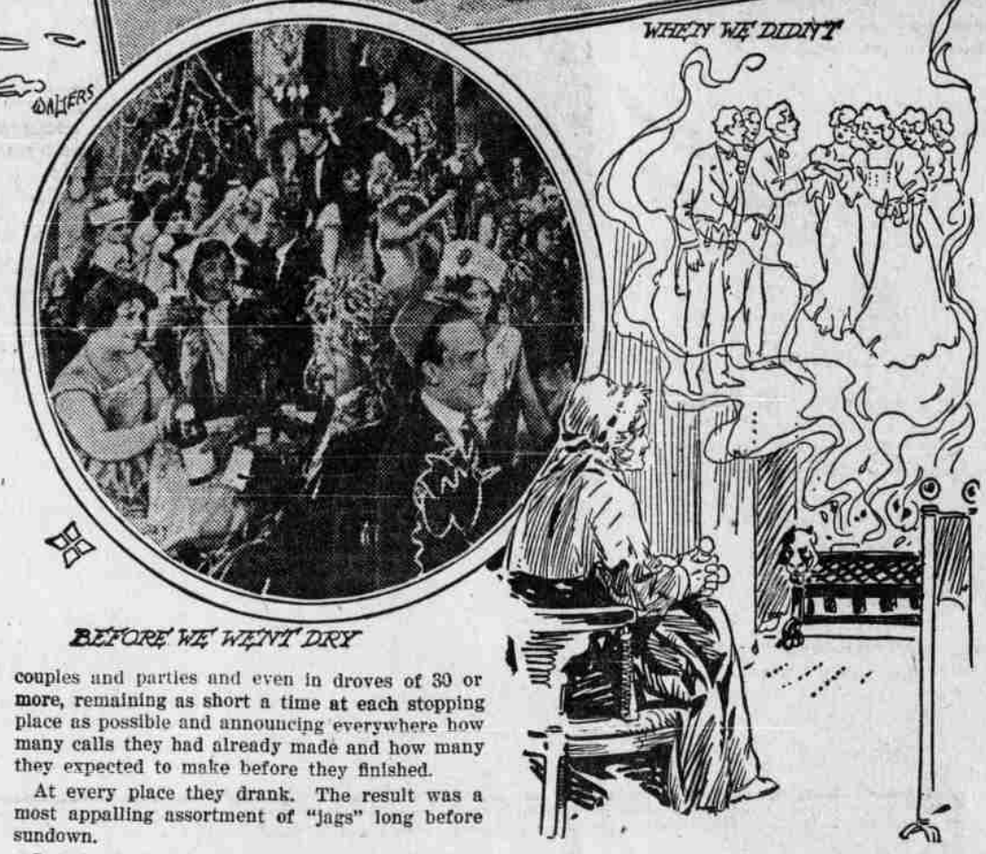
When We All Made New Year's Calls



"WHEREAS, experience has taught us that on New Year's day and May day from the firing of guns, the planting of Maypoles, and drunken drinkers, there has resulted unnecessary waste of powder and much intoxication, with the bad practices and bad accidents; therefore we expressly forbid any firing of guns and beating of drums. . . ."

This is the beginning of one of the many New Year's proclamations of Peter Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherlands—his farm, the "Bouwerij," on Manhattan island gave the Bowery its name—by which he hoped to "prevent more sins, debaucheries and calamities" in New Amsterdam during his 17 years of administration, 1647-64. For it was in old New York that the American custom of New Year's calls had its beginning. And when the fun got too boisterous old Peter would come stumping along on his silver-banded wooden leg and try to make an unwilling rattle-watch enforce his proclamation.

New Year's day was the holiday par excellence in old New York. It was a day peculiarly dedicated to family congratulations and the renewal of friendships in expressions of sympathy and good will, which, following so closely the sacred festival of Christmas, inspired all with peculiar significance. Washington Irving has said: "New York was then a handy town. Anyone who did not live over the way was to be found round the corner." So the making of New Year's calls was easy. Let us glance at the New Amsterdam of that day on the first day of the new year.

The sober, older citizens, sturdy figures, richly and warmly clothed, walk, slowly smoking, to the fort to render New Year's wishes to the officers of the garrison and then to the White Hall by the Battery to do the governor the same honor. Ever since daybreak a noisier element has reveled up and down the narrow lanes and by the banks of the canal (now Broad street), shouting greetings, beating drums, firing muskets, blowing horns, shaking "rumbling-pots" and drinking rivers of beer. A group of young burghers, with some clumsy firearm, a snaphance or a murtherer, have gone from door to door of each corbel-roofed house firing blank volleys, gathering recruits, drinking more beer, till all repair to Beekman's Swamp (known to this day in New York as the Swamp) to fire at a target.

Noise and New Year's continued to be closely connected in the days of the American colonies. New Year's day was a favorite day for shooting at a mark, for shooting for prizes, and "target companies" of very respectable citizens rose early in the morning for these contests. For it was deemed most selfish and rather disreputable for a man to spend the entire day in such shooting. He could go with his "target company" in the morning, but he must pay a round of calls to the fair in the afternoon.

In the days of New Year's celebration in New York, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the town seemed a great family reunion, in which each man vied with the other in boisterous delight. Shops were lighted, windows garlanded, streets crowded. Great vans—stages with four and six horses—were crowded with groups of men, often a group of kinsfolk, or old neighbors, or a hilarious mob of men allied in politics—or some "target company" or "band of old firemen." The acquaintances of each were called upon in turn.

It was about the beginning of the nineteenth century that the change from a neighborly observance to one of pure fashion began in all the large cities. The younger women of such households as had daughters were hostesses, and great was their rivalry, one with another, in respect to richly loaded refreshment tables and elegance of toilet. The dudes of those days—they called them "beaux" and "dandies" and "gallants"—attired themselves in their best and started out early in the morning on their calls.

It was not until about the middle of the century that the abuse which finally led to the custom's decline began. For years the dandies of New York and other large cities rivaled one another in the length of their calling lists, and the calls soon came to be nothing more than hasty stops—mere rapid gorgings of cake and gulpings of wine—instead of the old-time friendly calls of men upon the families of their friends and acquaintances.

Then the ladies—the matrons as well as the young women—began to vie with one another in the number of their callers. This led to the most extraordinary practices. Callers were recruited, indeed much as customers are drummed up by dealers in soap. Cards announcing that Miss This-or-That would be "at home" on January 1 were sent out almost indiscriminately.

Then the Sunday papers of the time began to print lists of those who would receive and the houses of those mentioned in the lists were sure to be besieged by numbers of men whom the ladies had never met or heard of and desired never to meet again. Men would go calling in couples and parties and even in droves of 30 or more, remaining as short a time at each stopping place as possible and announcing everywhere how many calls they had already made and how many they expected to make before they finished.

At every place they drank. The result was a most appalling assortment of "jags" long before sundown.

Late in the fifties the abuse came to be so great that the newspapers and the ministers took it up, and many were the editorials written and many the sermons preached against it. This crusade speedily brought results.

It was not many years before the smart set of young men in most cities stopped calling. The hospitable door that had been open from morning to evening was adorned with a basket for cards. Gentlemen were driven all over town depositing their visiting cards in these baskets. In a year or so servants were delivering these cards. Then the baskets disappeared and the mail carrier delivered the few cards sent out. Of course this process was not at all uniform. It was fast in some cities, slow in others.

A belle of the eighties, sitting in her easy chair, thumbing over an old scrapbook filled with faded cuttings from the newspapers of those days; her husband, a beau of the same period, in slippers and dressing gown, smoking and listening as she spoke and read, now and then nodding his head and smiling at some memory recalled; and the daughters of the house, planning for the watch party festivities of 1920, listening with curious interest and laughing and chatting about how odd it all seemed now—such a scene was doubtless to be witnessed in many a city all over the country with the closing days of 1919.

"We didn't go in so much for the watch parties in those days," the matron said. "The whistles blew and there was some noise, it is true, among the downtown folk, but we girls, as a rule, retired early—we had to save ourselves for the trying ordeal of the next day, for New Year's day was the great social event of the year. It was 'receiving day' in all the homes of the town. We called it 'keeping open house.'

"It was a day of lavish entertainment and the doors were supposed to be open to everybody that called, whether friend or stranger. We prepared for it weeks in advance. It was a period of great conviviality. Aside from the fact that the conviviality was somewhat overdone, at times, that old custom of the New Year's open house was quite an old-fashioned, sincere expression of good fellowship to friend and neighbor and visiting strangers—opening the portals of the New Year, as it were, with a greeting and a home welcome. And as a social function, it was most delightful—it helped to bring people together.

"It was the fashion to give each of the callers a souvenir to carry away with them and all sorts of ingenious little devices were used. Some had silk badges with the names of the girl painted on them; some had dainty metal souvenirs specially struck off, others ornate cards with mottoes, and some went in for the oddities, like the clay pipes that papa tells about. I remember the gentlemen used to wear these souvenirs pinned or tied with ribbons to their coats—as the knights of old wore their ladies' favors—and late in the evening the callers looked like foreign diplomats, with all their decorations, or, perhaps, like South African chiefs would be the better simile.

"Of course, only the gentlemen called—they were never accompanied by ladies. The ladies remained in their homes to receive them. The gentlemen were supposed to be in full dress—the younger set wore swallowtails and crush hats, and the older gentlemen Prince Albert coats and light gray, pin-striped trousers—that was the vogue. The old timers, I remember, did not take very kindly to the crush hats. And everybody, of course, had to have a hack or a sleigh.

"The hostess of the house usually called to her assistance a bevy of the young girls who made up the receiving line and helped to dispense the hospitality of the home. I remember one season when we had more than 200 callers. The custom was to stay a few moments only, chat, drink and eat, and then go on to the next house. One of the rooms, however, was cleared for dancing and in the late hours the callers would select partners and whirl through a waltz, a polka or a schottishe, or perhaps a set of the quadrille. Every house had a band of musicians.

"The 'open house' function was a very elaborate dress affair—the women vied with one another in beautiful costuming and the month before New Year's was a harvest for the dressmakers.

"From 2 o'clock until late in the night the parlors were filled with guests. The lower portion of the house had been previously beautifully decorated with flowers and exotics and all who called were made to feel perfectly at home. In the dining room was a table with all sorts of eatables and dainties, with rare wines and punches. At 2 o'clock, when the reception opened, the blinds were drawn and the gas lighted. During the day favored callers were invited to return at night for a dance."

With the gradual abandoning of New Year's calls came in the gradual growth of the eating, drinking and revelry that before the war and prohibition marked New Year's eve in the cities. Here is a glimpse of Philadelphia in 1894:

"After the reserves and the Third district policemen had taken their positions the enormous crowd began to swell in size. In front of Independence hall, filling the street, was a jostling mob that became noisier the nearer the hands of the clock came to the midnight hour. Up Chestnut street there were two black masses that moved victoriously toward the statehouse.

"The gay and comic 'shooter' (mummer) did not put in appearance to any considerable extent until about 11 o'clock. Then he came from all directions.

"The thousands packed in the roadway sent up an answering cry to the first stroke of the big bell, and the rattle of pistol shots, despite the police orders against using weapons, was like the sound of musketry. The screams of whistles added to the din and on every side through the miles that the eyes could pierce fireworks went blazing upward."

And here is a glimpse of New York in 1906:

"All New York came out to celebrate the birth of the new year. Nothing like it was ever seen before for numbers or for enthusiasm. From the hour after dinner until long after midnight the celebration lasted. It consisted of noise, eating and drinking, with noise by far the predominating element. Men born in New York, who have lived here all their lives, looked at the carnival in wide-eyed astonishment.

"At least 50,000 men and women packed Broadway and the side streets near Trinity church from half past eleven o'clock until long after midnight. To hear the chimes? Oh, no. To blow horns and whistles and spring rattles and yell and thus drown out the very pretty chimes of old Trinity that welcomed in the New Year. Every table in every big restaurant was taken weeks in advance."

In 1914 the police in most of the large cities ordered "sane" New Year's celebrations. In consequence there was a marked diminution of the revelry; in many cities midnight closing and community celebrations marked the occasion.

Thus the celebration of New Year's day in noise, drinking, eating and calling—has grown to be a climax and become "sane." What next?

GHOULS ROB GRAVE OF YOUNG WOMAN

Disinter Body and Strip It of Jewelry Said to Be Worth $1,500.

Chicago.—When Clara Gunderberg died, seven years ago, her engagement ring went to her grave with her in St. Boniface cemetery.

Detective Sergeant Steve Barry dug into the grave recently and made the discovery that ghouls had stripped the remains of the engagement diamond, taking with it two other rings. The three articles of jewelry, buried with the girl, were worth $1,500. The police, the girl's mother, Rev. George Eisenbacher of the Angel Guardian's orphanage, Devon avenue and Robey

Ghouls Find $1,500 Jewelry in Girl's Grave.

street, and Charles Bigelow, superintendent of the graveyard, are co-operating in a search for the ghouls.

The girl's mother, who lives at Hermitage and Hyland avenues, and is widely known in North side German circles, visited her daughter's grave a short time ago.

The earth appeared to her to have been turned and soft. She suspected it had been tampered with and immediately notified Superintendent Bigelow. She later went to the minister. He asked the police to investigate.

Sergeant Barry found the grave had been dug up and the top torn from the coffin. He could find no jewelry in the remains. Graveyard officials have asked the police to again open the grave and turn the coffin over for a more thorough search for the rings.

"The grave unquestionably had been opened and the rings taken," Sergeant Barry reported to Capt. Max Danner, head of the Summerdale police.

Records show that the girl died in Lakeside hospital in 1912 after an operation.

Gets Heart Balm From Girl Who Jilted Him

Damage to a man's heart resulting from his being "jilted" in a love affair has been placed at $250 by a jury in Hoboken, N. J.

Peter Meehan, past middle life, plaintiff in the action against Miss Bridget Hangley, a comely lass, forty-two, for breach of promise of marriage, has the distinction of being the first man in the county to win a verdict for heart balm against a woman.

The would-be bridegroom testified that he would have never thought of marriage if Miss Hangley had not "popped the question" herself.

PASTOR GETS QUEER BEQUEST

Heir to $87,000 Must Provide Care for Woman's Birds, Cats, Dogs and Rabbits.

Eureka, Cal.—Rev. James MacDonald, a Methodist minister residing here, has been named at sole heir in the will of Mrs. Amelia Smith Woodbury to an estate valued at $87,000. In addition to other property, the minister has been given charge of 85 canaries, 31 dogs, 18 cats and a hutch of rabbits, with the understanding that the pets shall receive "all the care and comforts to which they have been accustomed."

Rev. Mr. MacDonald is carrying out the trust, but the rabbits are multiplying so rapidly that he entertains doubts as to how he is going to provide room for them a year from now.

Woman Rivals Burbank.

Centralia, Wash.—Rivaling Luther Burbank, Mrs. S. C. Davis of this city has developed a new variety of aster that is a marvel of beauty to local floral enthusiasts who have seen it. The flower petals are purple, embroidered with white and were developed after four years of careful selection along Burbank lines by Mrs. Davis.

WIDOW IS SLAIN AND HOME RIFLED

Reputed to Be Miser With Vast Hoard Hidden In Her House.

WAS LOCAL TRADITION

Several Persons Arrested on Suspicion, Including Victim's Son-in-Law, Said to Have Been Last to See Her Alive.

Hoopeston, Ill.—Although they lived within a few blocks of each other on the ouskirts of this town, Mrs. Mary Buhler visited her mother, Mrs. Sabina Cummings, only once a week—on Sunday, after church.

Mrs. Cummings was noted in the section for her desire for solitude, which even her daughter could not invade.

When the daughter called at noon one day recently she found the front door open. This had not occurred in the eight years since her father's death. She saw also a light in the sitting room.

She entered and found the body of her mother lying on a lounge. The old woman was dead. The body was covered with blood. The head had been caved in by a heavy blow. The room was in great disorder.

Thought to Have Hoard.

Mrs. Cummings, who was eighty-two, was reputed to be the miser of Hoopeston, and her little two-story frame house, which she owned, was known as the "golden house." Natives frequently pointed it out to visitors with the remark:

"The old lady has got thousands and thousands of dollars hidden there."

It became a town tradition.

When the husband of the aged woman died eight years ago a search of the house was made. In out-of-the-way places more than $18,000 in cash was found.

Subsequently the rumor spread that this was but a tithe of the wealth of Mrs. Cummings. Not even her daughter could tell how much money was in the house.

The authorities had warned Mrs. Cummings to put her money in bank. They told her the rather isolated situ-

The Old Woman Was Dead.

ation of her house, her own feebleness and her reputed wealth would prove a temptation which in time might result in tragedy.

She refused all counsel and asked to be let alone.

Last Seen by Son-in-Law.

She was seen alive last at 5:30 on a Saturday afternoon by her son-in-law, Fred Buhler.

That night, between eight and ten o'clock, neighbors tell of seeing two men cross the fields and make for the house. In the course of the evening the same two men were seen to drive away in an automobile.

Nobody saw them enter the house. The place was found to be thoroughly ransacked. Not an article of furniture had been left untouched. Tin boxes had been found opened and their contents strewn about the rooms. Papers were thrown about, pictures smashed in an effort to locate money behind them.

The police believe that about $10,000 in loot was secured by the woman's slayer. Several persons have been arrested on suspicion, including the son-in-law of the dead woman, who, it is said, was the last person to see her alive.

Co-eds Rout Air Mice.

Greencastle, Ind.—Armed with tennis racquets, brooms and other weapons, the 60 co-ed residents of Mansfield hall, DePauw university, waged war on mice of the winged variety. After an hour's battle, during which the girls wore towels about their heads to prevent the bats from lodging in their hair, the entire neighborhood had been aroused from its slumbers and 32 bats had been put to sleep for all time. The night fliers gained entrance to the dormitory through an open window in an unoccupied room.